

No. 118. An act relating to the County and Regional Governance Study Committee.

(S.159)

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. COUNTY AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE STUDY

COMMITTEE; REPORT

(a) Creation. There is created the County and Regional Governance Study Committee to address local government capacity challenges, enhance and optimize public safety, regional collaboration and planning, efficient, equitable, and transparent public resource allocation, and effective regional public services for individuals and municipalities.

(b) Membership. The Committee shall be, to the extent possible, composed of members from geographically diverse regions of the State. The Committee shall be composed of the following members:

(1) three current members of the House of Representatives, who shall not all be from the same political party, the first of whom shall be the Chair of the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs, and the second and third of whom shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House; and

(2) three current members of the Senate, who shall not all be from the same political party, the first of whom shall be the Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, and the second and third of whom shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees.

(c) Powers and duties.

(1) The Committee shall study and make recommendations to the General Assembly on how to improve the structure and organization of county and regional government, including:

(A) enhancement and optimization of public safety;

(B) enhancement of regional collaboration and planning;

(C) efficient, equitable, and transparent allocation of public resources;

(D) promotion of effective regional public services for individuals and municipalities;

(E) clarification of the role and oversight of elected county officials and their departments;

(F) reduction of duplicated public services and promotion of opportunities for intermunicipal collaboration;

(G) balance of availability and cost of services across municipalities in each county;

(H) mechanisms of county and regional government structures in other states; and

(I) impact of climate change and resiliency on the maintenance of public infrastructure, delivery of regional government services, and coordination of regional emergency planning.

(2) The Committee may, through the Joint Fiscal Office, contract with one or more consultants to assist with research, preparation of the report, and

any other assistance with the Committee's work deemed necessary by the Committee.

(d) Assistance. The Committee shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Office of Legislative Operations, the Office of Legislative Counsel, and the Joint Fiscal Office.

(e) Report. On or before November 1, 2025, the Committee shall report to the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Government Operations with its findings and any recommendations for legislative action.

(f) Meetings.

(1) The Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations shall call the first meeting of the Committee to occur on or before September 1, 2024.

(2) The Committee shall be co-chaired by the Chair of the House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs and the Chair of the Senate Committee on Government Operations.

(3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

(4) The Committee shall cease to exist on July 1, 2026.

(g) Compensation and reimbursement. For attendance at meetings during adjournment of the General Assembly, a legislative member of the Committee serving in the member's capacity as a legislator shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses pursuant to 2 V.S.A. § 23 for

not more than 10 meetings. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the General Assembly.

Sec. 2. COUNTY AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE TECHNICAL
ADVICE

(a) On or before September 1, 2024, the Executive Director of the Vermont Bond Bank, shall convene the first meeting of a County and Regional Governance Technical Advisory Group. The Technical Advisory Group shall analyze the subject matter being considered by the County and Regional Governance Study Committee and advise, assist, and provide recommendations to the Study Committee, specifically on the structure and organization of county and regional government. The Vermont Bond Bank shall participate in order to support improvements to local capacity.

(b) The following individuals and entities shall be invited to participate in the meeting or meetings described in this section:

- (1) the Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs;
- (2) the State Court Administrator;
- (3) the Vermont Association of County Judges;
- (4) the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies;
- (5) the Vermont Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Association;
- (6) the Vermont League of Cities and Towns;
- (7) the Vermont Regional Development Corporations;
- (8) the Vermont School Boards Association;

(9) the Vermont Town and City Management Association; and

(10) other relevant stakeholders identified by the Technical Advisory Group.

(c) The Study Committee may at any time request advice from the Technical Advisory Group regarding issues relating to the structure and organization of county and regional government, which shall be provided by the Technical Advisory Group.

Sec. 3. FEDERAL DISASTER FUNDING FOR COUNTY AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS REPORT

On or before September 15, 2024, the Secretary of Administration, or designee, shall report to the County and Regional Governance Study Committee on federal funding opportunities resulting from the disaster declaration for the major flooding events of 2023 in the State, including the received federal funds, the status of pending applications for funding, and potential avenues for additional funds. The Secretary, or designee, shall provide an analysis of the impact of Vermont's lack of robust county or regional governance on the receipt of federal emergency funding.

Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on passage.

Date Governor signed bill: May 28, 2024